

OTHER NOTICES

Bertalanffy, L. von. *Problems of Life: An Evaluation of Modern Biological Thought.* London, 1952. Watts. Pp. xix + 216. Price 25s.

THIS book is a translation of *Das Biologische Weltbild*, originally published in German in 1949. It is a commentary on, rather than a solution of, some of the classical and more recent philosophical problems encountered in the study of living organisms, considered from a holistic point of view. Von Bertalanffy's "Organismic Conception," which he claims to have originated and to have developed in numerous publications since 1926, stresses that living systems are organized with a complex hierarchy of inter-relations which extends from the ecological, through the anatomical to the biochemical level and beyond.

The main points of his argument may be briefly summarized. His discussion includes the problem of wholes and their inter-related parts; in the words of the poet Coleridge, this is "the power that unites a given all into a whole which is presupposed by all its parts." The author raises hopes that a solution will be given in a second volume in terms of a "General System Theory" but gives no clue as to what this may mean. Further main points discussed are: the dynamic state of the constituents of the body: the problem presented to a theoretical biologist by the phenomena of regulating eggs: the unsatisfactory state of the theory of evolution based as it is on random changes and competition for survival. He says: "What really matters is the statement that evolution is not a process at random, but is governed by definite laws, and we believe that the discovery of these laws constitutes one of the most important tasks of the future theory of evolution."

The book is entirely taken up with the impossibility of solving these problems, except in terms of the author's "Organismic Conception," i.e. that organisms are organized. There is recognition of the work of those who analyse and experiment but little to suggest new experiments or different ways of approach. Between the quotations from Goethe and from his own works, von Bertalanffy writes in a verbose style, dramatically loaded with symbolism. Beneath this array much of the substance of the book is admirable, and it would be well worth the labour of excavation if it were not for the fact that all this is expressed in a more readable form in many of the works listed in his bibliography. Considering all, one cannot help feeling that in the search for over-riding concepts he ignores difficulties and details and that these sweeping statements carry conviction only so long as they remain sufficiently vague to be interpreted as he pleases.

However, it is not often that one is able to read

a book such as this, which considers comprehensively a considerable volume of philosophical thought not otherwise available in English. The extensive bibliography indicates how widely holistic views have spread among scientists in the past thirty years, though it does not help to identify some of the names in the text. A considerable amount of previous knowledge is presumed, and this, together with the difficulties of the vocabulary in some places, makes the book unsuitable for the general reader. It is, however, valuable for the specialist as a guide to work formerly only available in German. ADRIAN HORRIDGE.

Crew, F. A. E. *Must Man Wage War? The Biological Aspect.* Thrift Books No. 18. London, 1952. Watts. Pp. 93. Price 1s. 6d.

PROFESSOR CREW has certainly the right to talk to the public on the biological aspects of war, for he is a biologist who has had experience of war in a fighting regiment, then as a medical man, and finally in various administrative medical posts. He is now Professor of Public Health and Social Medicine in the University of Edinburgh. His Preface is interesting and in it he warns the reader that the little book is derived from lectures in which he mixed scientific fact with personal opinion. The headings of the three chapters are: "Biological Aspects of the Causes of War," "Biological Aspects of the Conduct of War" and "Biological Aspects of the Consequences of War." In the first chapter there is a good deal of common-sense, and the comparison of the human species with certain social insects has a certain interest. As regards population pressure, it is remarked that science has provided the means of limiting the reproduction rate of any human group.

In the second chapter there is an exposition of the physical effects of continuing war, with the gradual reduction of medical fitness and with a progressive deterioration in the quality of the reinforcements for the army. It is noted how in the Boer War some eight thousand men died of typhoid fever, and how greatly improved are modern conditions, and also with regard to malaria. And then there are some notes about the atomic bomb, which could be enlarged with advantage.

As to the third and last chapter of the little book, the author has warned us that he will mix statistics with personal views and emotion, and this is what he has done. We have a paragraph on the "swarming" of Europe and on "acquisitive, imperialist, colonial wars." One might imagine that he regrets the colonization by Europe of the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The descriptive term "acquisitive, imperialist, colonial wars" really needs the corrective hand of the historian, and there are several such

"leftist" expressions. But we shall most of us agree with the general summing up of the last few pages and that "the pattern that war is now taking is completely horrible." C. F. ARDEN-CLOSE.

Jeffries, Liliass Blackett. *Change of Life and its Problems.* London, 1952. Gollancz. Pp. 125. Price 4s. 6d.

THIS book seems to be intended for simple-minded bourgeois women—the sort of women who still believe that flogging will prevent crime and that they will probably go mad at the menopause. Dr. Liliass Blackett Jeffries therefore tells them, in addition to small doses of medical knowledge and large doses of common sense, that "Support does come from the thought that underneath are the Everlasting Arms." A sample of the common sense is that "having passed the climacteric, it is pleasant to find that friendship with men comes without those disconcerting upheavals." During the crisis she advises women to rest for an hour every day. "Mr. Churchill believes in it" and practises the habit himself.

Whether for amusement, profit or comfort, the book can therefore be safely recommended to most women, who will doubtless be glad to hear that "A little weep is, I consider, allowable, but it must be an indulgence buried in privacy, including subsequent restoration of the complexion."

U. G. D.

Murphy, Douglas P. *Heredity in Uterine Cancer.* Cambridge, Mass., 1952. Harvard University Press. (London, Geoffrey Cumberlege.) Pp. xi + 128. Price 16s.

CANCER, even cancer of the uterus, is a common condition. It is easy, therefore, to find families in which several members have died of this complaint. To establish that the frequency with which near relations of patients with cancer of the uterus also have the complaint is greater than that among members of the general population needs a carefully planned investigation.

Professor Murphy has made a determined attempt to do this. His index cases consist of a series of 201 patients from Philadelphia with histologically proved cancer of the cervix of the uterus. Four field workers visited each of these patients and obtained from them information about the health of the patients' mothers, sisters, aunts and first cousins; when necessary, one member in each of the families of the patients was also visited and the records of family doctors, hospitals and bureaux of vital statistics were consulted.

For a study of this kind a control group is essential, but it is difficult to get one that is in every way satisfactory. Professor Murphy made use of a control group of 215 women, some of whom had been attending a dental clinic, some were volunteer members from women's clubs and a

small group were casual volunteers. The large volunteer element was obviously unsatisfactory, but in appealing for them it was stressed that those who already knew that there was a high incidence of cancer in their families were not suitable for the inquiry.

All the patients had cancer of the cervix, but among relations it was often impossible to distinguish between cancer of the cervix and cancer of the fundus of the uterus and so the two conditions were grouped together.

Taking all relations together, no difference between families of the patients and families of the controls was found in the frequency of types of cancer other than cancer of the uterus. But cancer of the uterus was found among the mothers and aunts of the patients more often than among the mothers and aunts of the control group to an extent which would only occur by chance about once in fifty times, the figures being twenty-one out of 600 for the cancer patients and eleven out of 813 for the control women. Among the sisters and cousins there was no difference between the two groups. In another survey very similar in plan Brøbeck found a significantly increased frequency of cancer of the uterus in the sisters but not among the mothers and aunts.

There is, then, a strong suggestion that near relations of patients with cancer of the cervix show cancer of the uterus more often than one would expect by chance—perhaps for genetic, perhaps for environmental reasons. But the increased risk to the near relations is not great. Professor Murphy does not say how many of his mothers and aunts are still alive and so likely to develop the condition, but presumably not many; therefore one in thirty probably represents a fair estimate of the risk in the mothers and aunts of the patients, compared to a risk of about one in seventy for mothers and aunts of the control group.

C. O. C.

Stopes, Marie. *Married Love.* Twenty-sixth Edition. London, 1952. Hogarth Press. Pp. xviii + 151. Price 7s. 6d.

Stone, Hannah and Abraham. *A Marriage Manual: A Practical Guide-book to Sex and Marriage.* New revised and enlarged edition. London, 1952. Gollancz. Pp. 314. Price 12s. 6d.

Boyd, Reynold H. *Controlled Parenthood: A Practical Handbook on Birth Control.* Fifth Edition. Revised and enlarged. London, 1952. Heinemann. Pp. 68. Price 5s.

REPRINTS of these three books were received within a few days of one another. All are welcome and each complements the others. *Married Love* needs no description; first published in 1918, it has now achieved its twenty-sixth edition, completing 1,020,000 copies. It has been printed in braille and translated into sixteen languages.

The first edition of *A Marriage Manual* was fully reviewed in this journal in October 1935; the book has been out of print in this country for many years, and the present revised edition incorporates recent advances in the understanding of the problems of sex and marriage both from the physiological and psychological points of view. In the Foreword to the second edition Dr. Abraham Stone writes of his wife and co-author, Dr. Hannah Stone, whose untimely death in 1941 was a great loss to the marriage consultation movement in America. Dr. C. P. Blacker writes the introduction to this edition which, as before, takes the form of

questions and answers between a young couple and their doctor.

Controlled Parenthood was first published in 1944. The second chapter describes eugenic reasons for contraception and deals lucidly with the hereditary diseases including those such as asthma which do not constitute a eugenic barrier to procreation.

The bulk of the book deals very thoroughly with the chemical and mechanical methods of birth control and includes a safe-period chart after Latz and Reiner. It is copiously illustrated and adequately indexed.

K. H.

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